United Nations

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FRIDAY HIGHLIGHTS

◆ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) begins airlift operation to Ogaden region in south-eastern Ethiopia.

◆ General Assembly authorizes $13.8 million budget for United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL) for first six months.

◆ Yemen requests Security Council meeting to consider question of immigration and settlement in Israeli occupied territories.

◆ The United Nations Disaster Relief Organization reports shortfall of $239.7 million for United Nations humanitarian operation in the Persian Gulf following recent pledging conference; convenes inter-agency meeting to review situation in Philippines following volcanic eruptions.

◆ United States rejects legitimacy of document circulated by Iraq, containing interview with United States General Norman Schwarzkopf by Israeli correspondent.

◆ The Social Committee of the Economic and Social Council concludes work for session by recommending that Council enlarge Commission on Narcotic Drugs to 53 members.

◆ Experts at meeting of parties to Convention to protect ozone layer say threat of ozone depletion has grown since Convention's establishment.

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The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) announced today that it had launched the first airlift to the Ogaden region in south-eastern Ethiopia where some 88,000 returnees had been completely cut off from any international aid for the past three weeks.

According to regional authorities, 60 people are dying there every day. The UNHCR has scheduled a total of 46 flights to the area to prevent further deaths while the overland route is made secure. Three one-and-a-half-hour flights are to leave the capital Addis Ababa every day.

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Besides wheat, beans, sugar and vegetable oil, the planes are also carrying a complete self-sufficient logistics set-up, including light trucks, shortwave radio equipment, warehousing facilities, and a thirty-member team to manage and distribute the relief assistance. Relief infrastructure in the region was partially destroyed during the recent change of government.

While progress is being made in south-eastern Ethiopia, UNCHR reports that the situation in the western part of the country is critical. Field reports indicate that attacks by armed groups are causing a renewed flight of refugees. The UNHCR has not been able to get into the camps because the roads have been mined and the bridges destroyed. However, field reports indicate that hundreds of thousands of refugees are fleeing back over the border into the Sudan.

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The General Assembly today approved the budget of a new United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador, thereby paving the way for the Mission -- ONUSAL -- to begin monitoring human rights in the Central American country.

The Assembly approved the appropriation of $13.8 million to finance the Mission's first six months, from 1 July to 31 December, as an ad hoc arrangement.

The Assembly took that action by adopting, without a vote, a resolution which also authorized the Secretary-General to enter into commitments for an amount not exceeding $9.2 million gross ($8.8 million net) to cover ONUSAL's costs for a further six months from 1 January to 30 June 1992. The costs are to be apportioned among Member States. The Assembly also invited voluntary contributions to the Mission in cash and in the form of services and supplies.

The first phase of ONUSAL will have the mandate of verifying fulfilment of the human rights agreement signed between the Government of El Salvador and the Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (FMLN) in San Jose, Costa Rica, in July 1990.

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Yemen has requested a meeting of the Security Council to consider the question of immigration and settlement in the Israeli occupied territories.

The request was contained in a letter dated 20 June to the Council President from Yemeni Ambassador Abdalla Saleh Al-Ashtal.

In a separate development, the Permanent Observer for Palestine has sent a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 19 June, condemning the treatment of Palestinians in Kuwait. Observer Nasser Al-Kidwa said the 200,000 Palestinians were living in extremely difficult conditions. He called the recent tribunals a "sham", saying they were "illegal in form and substance".

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Mr. Al-Kidwa appealed to the Secretary-General to urge the Kuwaiti Government not to carry out the death sentences that were handed down to a number of Palestinians and other Arabs.

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According to the United Nations Disaster Relief Organization (UNDRO), the United Nations humanitarian operation in the Persian Gulf has a funding shortfall of $239.7 million, following the most recent pledging conference in Geneva. In a situation report issued today, the Agency said a degree of stability seems to have returned to the northeastern provinces of Iraq following unrest between 30 May and 2 June, except for Kousenjag and Suleimaniya, where on 12 and 13 June new clashes were reported.

Some 400,000 Iraqi refugees had returned to the province of Dohuk, most of them to their villages and towns of origin, including villages which had been evacuated and destroyed between 1978 and 1988. According to UNDRO, however, some 60,000 to 80,000 of them may still need assistance throughout the summer or beyond since they cannot return to their homes.

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The UNDRO also reported today that the Philippines suffered two additional minor volcanic eruptions yesterday which sent steam clouds some 5,000 metres into the sky. Heavy rains have raised fears of new mudflows. According to the local media, the death toll has passed 200 and could easily rise to 300. Over 145,000 people have been evacuated and are sheltered in some 150 relief centres.

The Agency reported that immediate needs included tents, blankets, clothing, flashlights, water containers, food and sanitation materials.

The Philippine Government has estimated property damage at over $74 million dollars. According to UNDRO, the Government is stepping up relief efforts and has started a major campaign to restore power and water and to rebuild bridges. Key roads have been opened since Wednesday, and Manila airport was reopened last night for selected international flights. The airport will be closed again tonight to check the runway.

The United Nations Disaster Relief Organization has convened a meeting with the participation of the World Bank to review the situation and formulate a plan of international assistance.

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The United States has rejected the legitimacy of an "interview" between United States General Norman Schwarzkopf and an Israeli Army Radio correspondent which was circulated by Iraq as a document of the Security Council.

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In a letter dated 19 June to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, United States Ambassador Alexander Watson called the interview "a complete fabrication". He stated that such an interview had never taken place and that by circulating it, Iraq had abused the right of United Nations Member States to circulate information to other Members.

In a letter dated 11 June, transmitting the interview, Iraqi Chargé d'affaires Samir Al-Nima had asserted that General Schwarzkopf's reported statements had confirmed that the "true objective" of the coalition aggression had been not merely to liberate Kuwait but to "smash Israel's enemies".

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The Social Committee of the Economic and Social Council concluded its work for the first regular session of 1991 today by deciding to enlarge the Commission on Narcotic Drugs from 40 to 53 members.

Should the Council adopt the text it would distribute the 13 new seats as follows: four seats for the African Group; three seats for the Asian Group; three seats for the Latin American and Caribbean Group; one seat for the Eastern European Group; one seat for the Western European and Others Group; and one seat to rotate between the Asian Group and the Latin American and Caribbean Group every four years. The Council would fill the new seats at its organizational session next year.

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International experts attending the second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer have warned that the threat of ozone depletion has expanded significantly since the establishment of the Convention and the Montreal Protocol.

The meeting, held at the headquarters of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi from 17 to 19 June, was attended by experts from 64 countries and 17 intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

The representative of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) underlined that all ozone observations since the late 1960s confirmed a significant decline in the ozone layer at all latitudes except in the equatorial belt. The decline of close to 3 per cent, between 65 degrees South and 65 degrees North, during the last decade was greater than registered earlier.

"There is no chance that we will be able to develop a complete picture of the ozone depletion threat unless we carry out research worldwide", said the Environment Programme's Executive Director, Mostafa K. Tolba, adding that developing countries needed sustained assistance in that task.

Among the many research priorities outlined by Mr. Tolba was the need to expand the monitoring of ozone and ultraviolet radiation as well as their effects. He also emphasized the need to improve understanding of the

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processes that controlled the abundance of compounds which influence ozone distribution. Those compounds included methane, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, and oxides of nitrogen and hydrogen.

Concern over ozone depletion in the early 1970s had stemmed from the possible role played by nitrogen oxides emitted by supersonic jets, a fear which the latest research had confirmed, he said.

The participants supported the idea of expanding the Global Ozone Observing System Network. The WMO and UNEP were planning to install 12 to 15 observation stations in the Arctic, eastern Siberia and in the tropical belt. To raise the level of understanding and awareness, the participants requested that two parties to the Convention provide scientific and technical training in ozone monitoring and research and other relevant assistance, especially in developing countries.

They appealed to those nations which had not yet become parties to the Convention to complete the formalities and join quickly. In addition, those parties to the Convention which had not ratified the Montreal Protocol were also invited to do so.

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